

VERTIGO

no. 48

willingham
buckingham
leialoha

FABLES™

wolves 1 of 2

June 06

SUGGESTED FOR
MATURE READERS
vertigo.com



BY LATE NOVEMBER I REACH THE SMALL PORT TOWN OF **PROVIDENIYA**. IT LIES ON RUSSIA'S CHUKOTKA PENINSULA, TOO CLOSE TO THE ARCTIC CIRCLE FOR MY COMFORT.

GOOD EVENING, CAPTAIN.



I WASN'T BRED FOR WINTER CLIMES.

IVANUSHKA ZHELEZHOVA'S INTERNATIONAL CAPITALISM SAMOVAR

MAY I SIT?

NEW BEER IS HERE



EVENING?

IT IS BARELY AFTER-NOON, ЧОЛГ WESTERNER.

MAY I SHARE THIS WITH YOU, CAPTAIN? TAKE THE EDGE OFF THE COLD?



WOLVES PART 1 OF 2

IN WHICH MOWGLI DRINKS IN A RUSSIAN BAR, RUNS INTO ONE DEAD END AFTER ANOTHER, AND PRACTICES A DEADLY FORM OF POLITICS.

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I WON'T
TURN DOWN FREE
DRINKING.

SIT, YOUNG
WESTERNER,
SIT.

IS IT
SO OBVIOUS
WHERE I'M
FROM?



OF COURSE. YOUR
RUSSIAN IS ATROCIOUS. **BARELY**
UNDERSTANDABLE.

AND WHO
ELSE HAS MONEY
FOR ENTIRE BOTTLES OF
VODKA IN THE DEAD
OF WINTER?



FAIR ENOUGH. TO
YOUR CONTINUED GOOD
HEALTH, SIR.

MAY I
ASK YOU SOME
QUESTIONS?

MMMM.



I TRACKED A MAN
HERE. HE ARRIVED LAST
SPRING, USING THE NAME
JOHN HÖLBER, BUT HE
MAY HAVE CHANGED
THAT AGAIN.

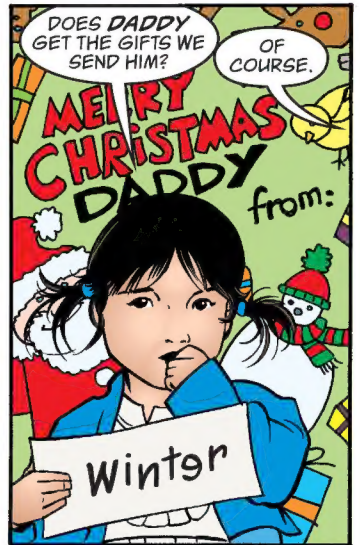
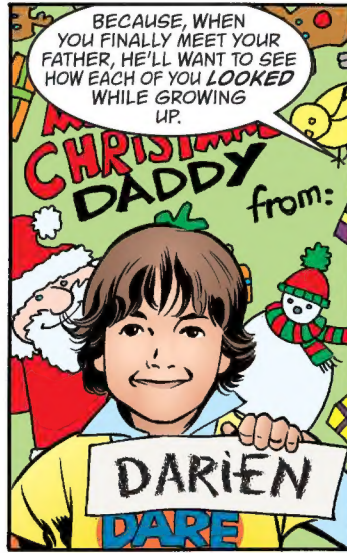
HE'S
CHANGED IT
OFTEN IN THE
PAST YEAR
OR SO.



SOUNDS LIKE
SOMEONE WHO DOESN'T
WANT TO BE FOUND.

TRUE. BUT
IF HE KNEW WHAT
NEWS I BRING, HE
MIGHT DECIDE
DIFFERENTLY.







OKAY, BABIES,
THE TORTURE'S OVER FOR
NOW. WE'RE DONE.

FINALLY!

YOU DIDN'T
TAKE A CHRISTMAS
PICTURE OF GRANDPA!
HE CAN DRESS AS
SANTA AGAIN!

GRANDPA
IS SANTA, ISN'T
HE, MOMMY?

DOES
HAVING CHRISTMAS EARLY
MEAN WE'RE SKIPPING
THANKSGIVING, AUNTIE
ROSE?

OF COURSE
NOT, SILLY
GOOSE.

MERRY
CHRISTMAS
DAD

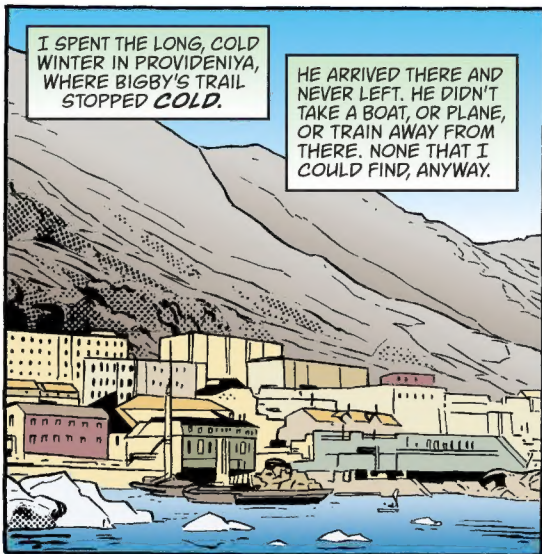
3 ABC

CAN
WE CHANGE OUT OF
OUR GOOD CLOTHES
NOW?

CAN WE
GO OUT AND
PLAY?

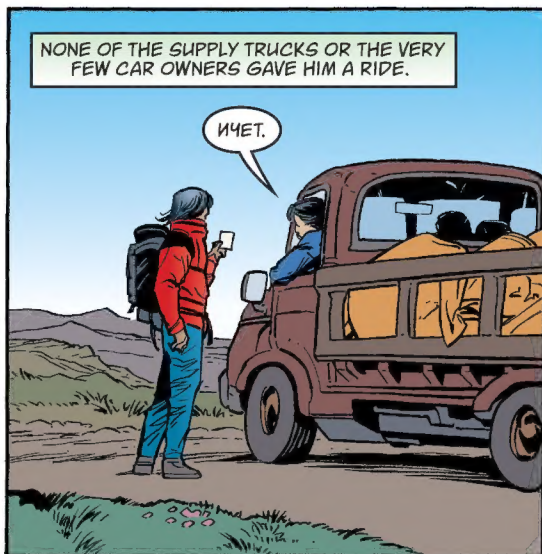
IN A MINUTE,
BUT I WANT YOU ALL TO
SIT DOWN FIRST. WE STILL HAVE
ONE IMPORTANT THING TO
TALK ABOUT.

YOU HAVE
A GROUP DECISION TO
MAKE ABOUT FLYING AND
CHANGING INTO WOLVES
AND SUCH.



I SPENT THE LONG, COLD WINTER IN PROVIDENIYA, WHERE BIGBY'S TRAIL STOPPED *COLD*.

HE ARRIVED THERE AND NEVER LEFT. HE DIDN'T TAKE A BOAT, OR PLANE, OR TRAIN AWAY FROM THERE. NONE THAT I COULD FIND, ANYWAY.



NONE OF THE SUPPLY TRUCKS OR THE VERY FEW CAR OWNERS GAVE HIM A RIDE.

ИЧЕТ.

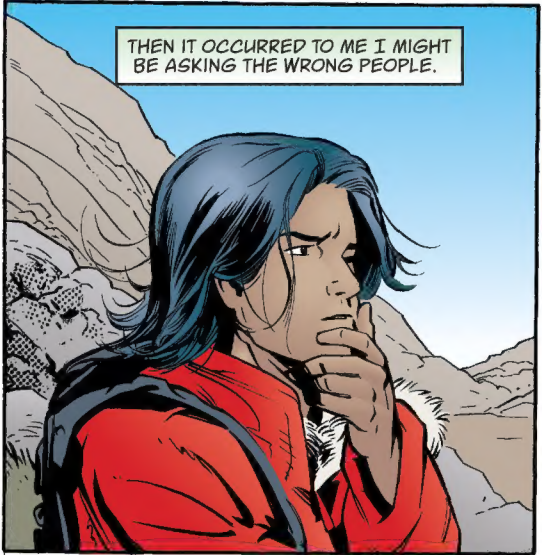


BUT NO ONE IN TOWN REMEMBERS EVER SEEING HIM, AND I STAYED LONG ENOUGH TO TALK TO EVERYONE.

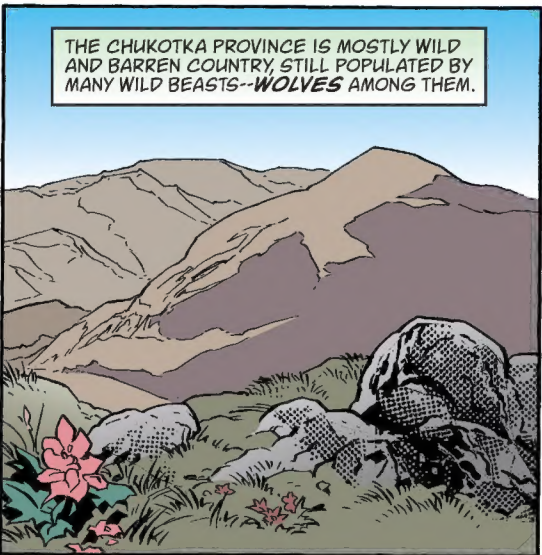
HE SIMPLY DISAPPEARED.



ИЧЕТ! I SAID LAST MONTH, I DON'T SEE THIS MAN.



THEN IT OCCURRED TO ME I MIGHT BE ASKING THE WRONG PEOPLE.



THE CHUKOTKA PROVINCE IS MOSTLY WILD AND BARREN COUNTRY, STILL POPULATED BY MANY WILD BEASTS--*WOLVES* AMONG THEM.





PERHAPS SO, BUT YOU ARE NOT ONE OF US, SO WE'LL SPEAK NO FURTHER TO YOU.

THEN I'LL *BECOME* ONE OF YOU, IF THAT'S WHAT IT TAKES TO GET YOU TO ANSWER MY QUESTIONS.



POINT OUT YOUR LEADER, SO THAT I MAY SLAY HIM AND TAKE OVER RULE OF THIS PACK.

THIS ISN'T THE TIME FOR SUCH THINGS.



PAH!
YOU WILL NOT SLINK AWAY LIKE DISH-LICKING DOGS, FOR THAT IS NOT MY WILL.

THIS IS NOW A KILLING MATTER.



ONCE I'D PUT THE LEAD WOLF ON THE SPOT HE COULDN'T REFUSE MY CHALLENGE AND STILL HOPE TO KEEP THE RESPECT AND LOYALTY OF THE PACK.

TURN AND FACE ME, OLD WOLF.

IF YOU *INSIST* ON THROWING YOUR LIFE AWAY.



BUT WE WILL DO THIS IN THE PROPER MANNER--TONIGHT AT THE COUNCIL ROCK.

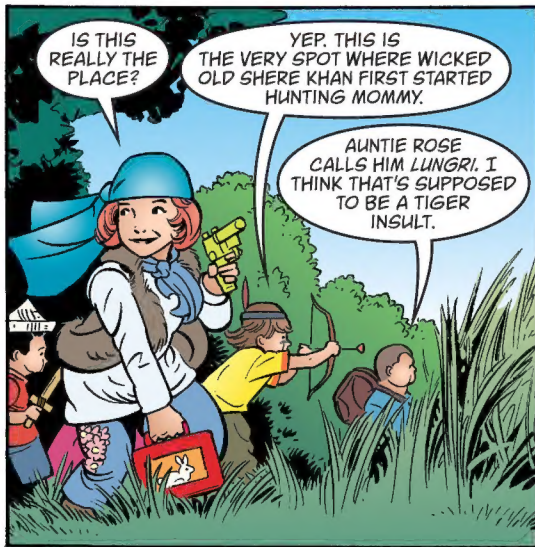
THERE I WILL TEAR AND REND YOU BENEATH MY FANGS.



AT THE SAME TIME AT THE FARM...

THIS IS THE HOUR OF PRIDE AND POWER, TALON AND TUSH AND CLAW.

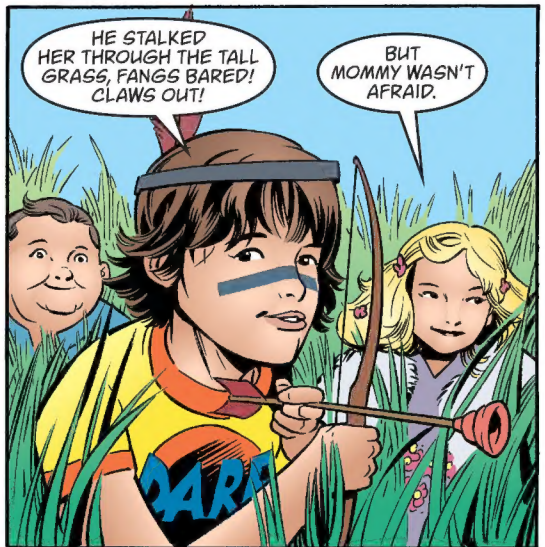
OH, HEAR THE CALL!-- GOOD HUNTING ALL, THAT KEEP THE JUNGLE LAW!



IS THIS REALLY THE PLACE?

YEP. THIS IS THE VERY SPOT WHERE WICKED OLD SHERE KHAN FIRST STARTED HUNTING MOMMY.

AUNTIE ROSE CALLS HIM LUNGRI. I THINK THAT'S SUPPOSED TO BE A TIGER INSULT.



HE STALKED HER THROUGH THE TALL GRASS, FANGS BARED! CLAWS OUT!

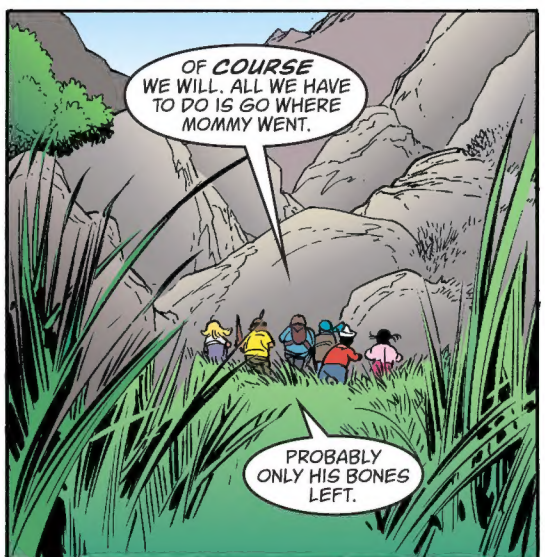
BUT MOMMY WASN'T AFRAID.



SHE LED THE DEADLY TIGER TOWARDS THE HIGH HILLS, WHERE THE GIANTS USED TO SLEEP.

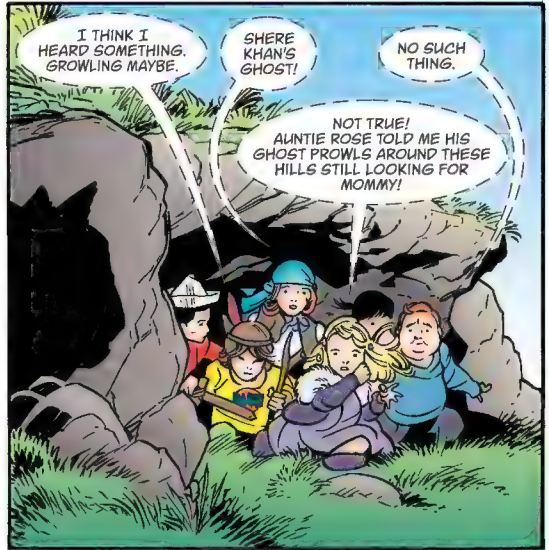
AND AUNTIE ROSE'S RAVEN CLARA TOO! WHEN SHE USED TO BE A DRAGON!

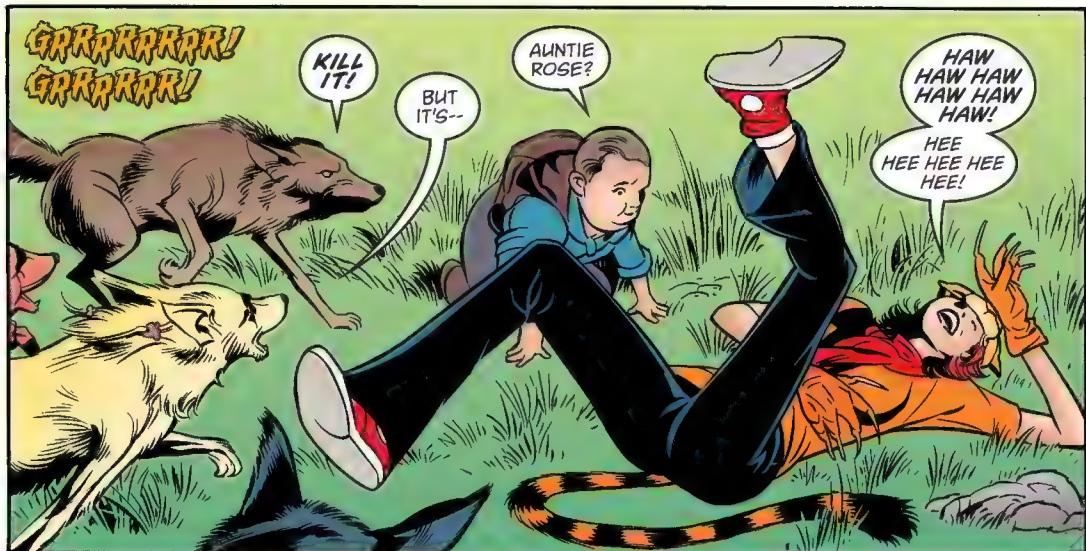
DO YOU THINK WE'LL REALLY FIND SHERE KHAN'S BODY?



OF COURSE WE WILL. ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS GO WHERE MOMMY WENT.

PROBABLY ONLY HIS BONES LEFT.





GARRRRR!
GARRRRR!

KILL IT!

BUT IT'S--

AUNTIE ROSE?

HAW HAW HAW HAW HAW!

HEE HEE HEE HEE HEE!



I GOT YOU!

I GOT YOU SO GOOD!

NO FAIR!

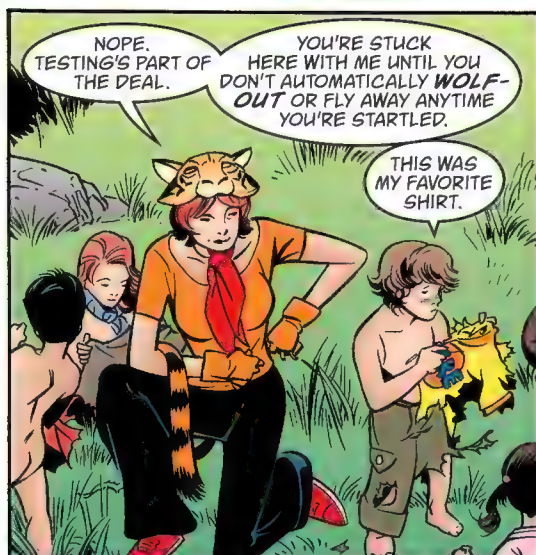
THAT WAS A TERRIBLE THING TO DO!



TOO BAD, HELLIONS. YOU ALL HEARD THE DEAL: NONE OF YOU CAN LEAVE THE FARM UNTIL YOU PROVE YOU CAN GO A WHOLE MONTH WITHOUT FLYING OR CHANGING FROM HUMAN FORM.

SO FAR YOUR RECORD IS THREE DAYS.

BUT YOU CHEATED!



NOPE. TESTING'S PART OF THE DEAL.

YOU'RE STUCK HERE WITH ME UNTIL YOU DON'T AUTOMATICALLY WOLF-OUT OR FLY AWAY ANYTIME YOU'RE STARTLED.

THIS WAS MY FAVORITE SHIRT.



BUT I DIDN'T FLY OR CHANGE, AUNTIE ROSE.

ONLY BECAUSE YOU WERE TOO SCARED TO DO ANYTHING.

TOO BAD, AMBROSE. IT'S A GROUP PROPOSITION. THE WHOLE PACK SUCCEEDS OR FAILS TOGETHER.

THAT NIGHT THE FREE PEOPLE MET AT THE COUNCIL ROCK.

THE PACK IS ASSEMBLED AND TUKAR OUR LEADER IS HERE. LET MOWGLI THE CHALLENGER STEP FORWARD.

AFTER THE NEWBORN CUBS WERE INTRODUCED TO THE PACK, AND AFTER AN APPROPRIATE AMOUNT OF GOSSIP AMONG THE ADULTS, IT WAS TIME FOR THE BLOOD-LETTING.

PUT ASIDE YOUR THUNDER-MAKER AND STEEL FANG.

AND STRIP AWAY YOUR ODD COVERINGS.

WE AREN'T MEN, OR SCREECHING MONKEYS WHO USE TOOLS, AND DRESS IN SKINS NOT OUR OWN.

THE LAW OF THE PACK ALLOWS FOR NO WEAPONS BUT THE ONES YOU WERE BORN WITH.

NO PROTECTION BUT YOUR OWN FUR AND SKIN.

NO CHANCE OF BACKING OUT NOW.

THAT'S WHY I'LL SOON FEEL YOUR BONES GRINDING UNDER MY TEETH.



THE FREE PEOPLE AREN'T LIKE MEN, CONSTANTLY
DITHERING AND REVISING.

MAYBE
SO.



STATEMENTS BOLDLY MADE
CAN'T BE LATER WITHDRAWN.

MAYBE
NOT.



AS SOON AS I ISSUED MY CHALLENGE,
IT WAS ORDAINED ONE OR BOTH OF US
WOULD **DIE** BEFORE THE NIGHT ENDED.

HATEFUL
MAN!



KILL
YOU!





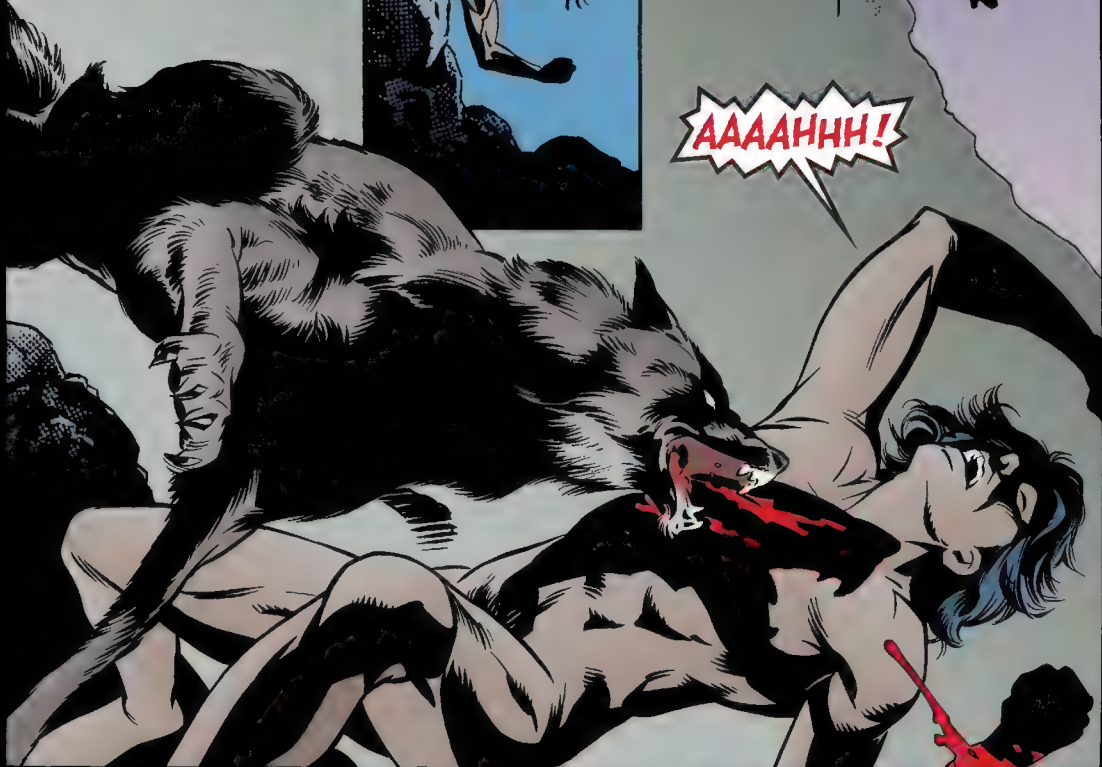
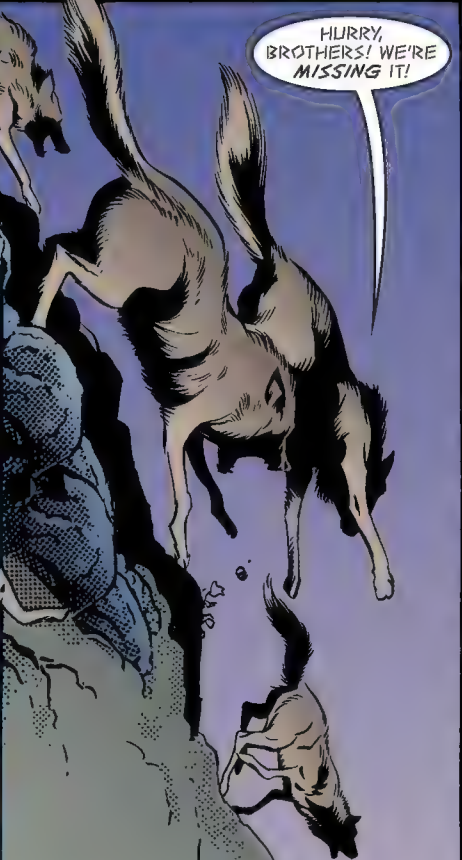
REND
YOUR
FLESH!

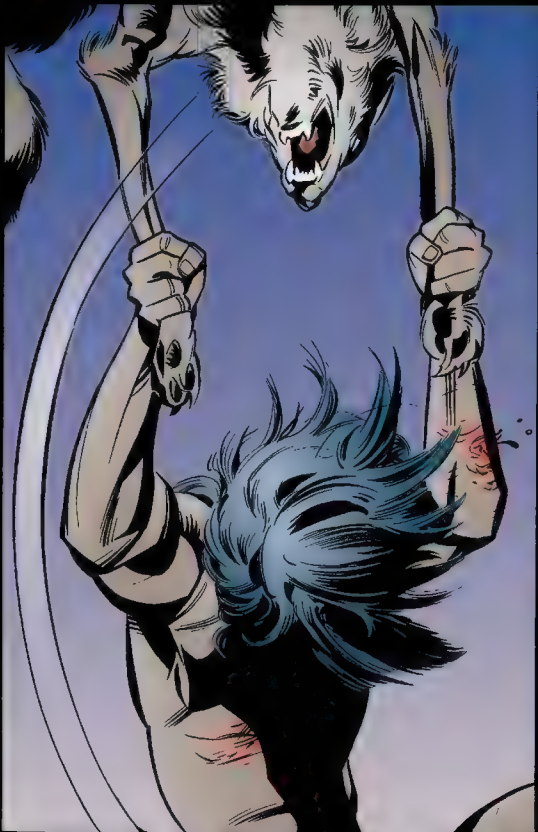
YIPE!

CHOMP!

YAHH!

YAAAAA-
AAHHHH!









I WON'T BE DYING TONIGHT.
TUKAR, ARE YOU STILL ALIVE?

FOR NOW.



YOUR BACK IS BROKEN-- ALONG WITH BOTH FORELEGS. YOU CAN NO LONGER HUNT. YOU CAN'T EVEN MOVE.

IF YOU PROMISE NOT TO BITE AT ME ANYMORE, I'LL COME OVER THERE AND FINISH YOU QUICKLY.



BITE, THOUGH, AND I'LL LEAVE YOU TO STARVE SLOWLY.

NO, IT'S OVER FOR ME. I'LL THANK YOU FOR A FINAL MERCY...



WAAAN!



THE NEXT DAY I HIKED ALL TOO SLOWLY BACK INTO TOWN FOR MEDICAL HELP. IT WAS ANOTHER TWO WEEKS BEFORE I COULD REJOIN MY NEW PACK.







"THE PACK GREW STRONG THAT SUMMER. WE NEVER ATE SO WELL AS WHEN HE WAS AMONG US."

"WE'VE NEVER ENJOYED SUCH ENDLESS BOUNTY!"

"DON'T GET USED TO IT. I CAN'T STAY."



"THEN A TERRIFYING DAY, ALL OF THE WINDS WERE CONFOUNDED, CONSTANTLY CHANGING AND BLOWING TOO STRONG TO CARRY READABLE SCENTS."

"WHEN WILL IT STOP, FATHER?"

"I DON'T KNOW."

"PERHAPS THE GOD OF WOLVES CAN CALM THEM?"



"WHEN THE EVIL WINDS FINALLY DIED, WE EMERGED FROM OUR DENS TO DISCOVER THE GOD OF WOLVES HAD LEFT US, WITH NO SURVIVING TRACE TO SHOW US WHERE HE WENT!"



"HE NEVER RETURNED."

"IT WAS YOUR GOD OF WOLVES WHO CREATED THE SORCERY WINDS-- TO COVER THE MANNER AND DIRECTION OF HIS DEPARTURE."



MOSCOW.

IN THE FOLLOWING MONTHS I REVISITED ALL OF THE PLACES BIGBY MIGHT HAVE DOUBLED BACK TO WITHOUT SUCCESS.

NO, SIR. I DON'T BELIEVE THAT MAN EVER STAYED *HERE*. PERHAPS IN ANOTHER HOTEL?

I'VE ALREADY CHECKED THEM.



I HAD TO *FINALLY* ADMIT THAT BIGBY WAS BETTER AT LOSING ME THAN I WAS AT TRACKING HIM.

I'M SORRY, PRINCE CHARMING. HE COVERED HIS TRAIL TOO WELL.

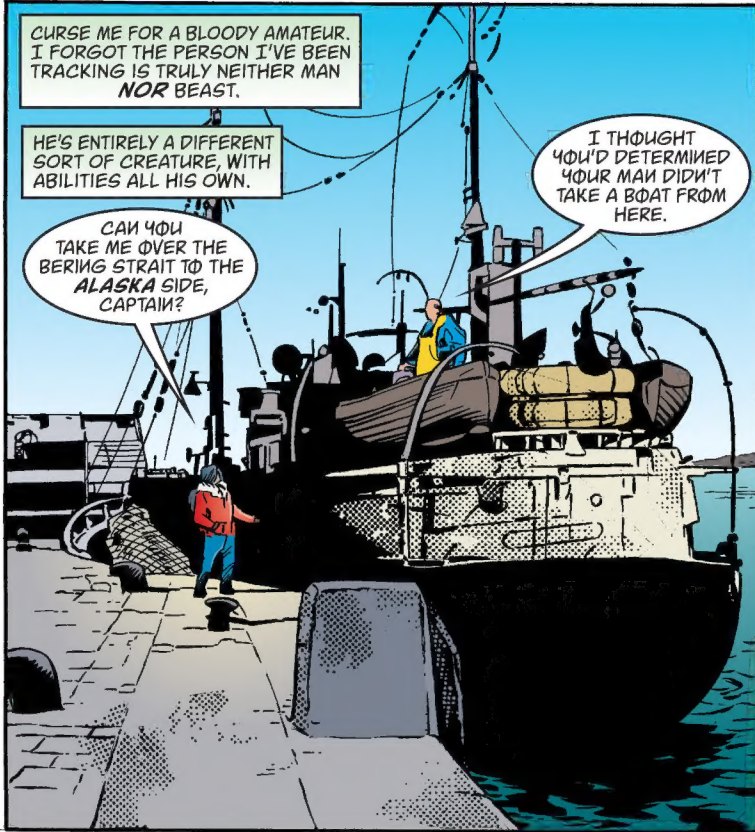
YOU CAN'T TRACK ONE *MAN* ON HIS OWN WITHOUT FRIENDS OR RICHES TO AID HIM?



...ONE MAN WHO CAN SOMETIMES BE A *WOLF* AND LIVE OFF THE LAND, AND...

HOLD ON. I JUST REALIZED WHAT A *FOOL* I'VE BEEN.

GOT TO GO, SIR. I'LL REPORT IN NEXT WEEK.



CURSE ME FOR A BLOODY AMATEUR. I FORGOT THE PERSON I'VE BEEN TRACKING IS TRULY NEITHER *MAN* NOR *BEAST*.

HE'S ENTIRELY A DIFFERENT SORT OF CREATURE, WITH ABILITIES ALL HIS OWN.

CAN YOU TAKE ME OVER THE BERING STRAIT TO THE *ALASKA* SIDE, CAPTAIN?

I THOUGHT YOU'D DETERMINED YOUR MAN DIDN'T TAKE A BOAT FROM HERE.



THAT'S RIGHT, HE DIDN'T.

BUT THEN WHY WOULD ONE SUCH AS HE *NEED* TO?

NEXT: WHEN WE ALL LIVED IN THE FOREST

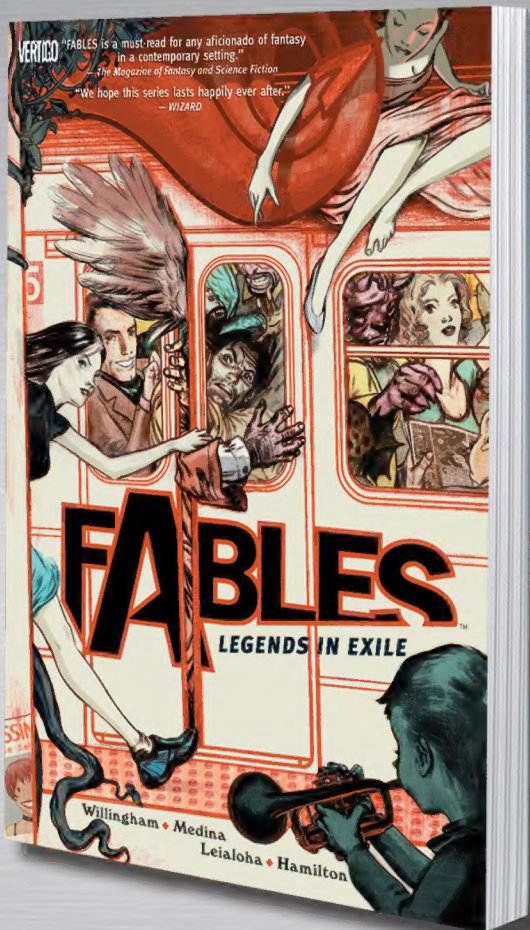
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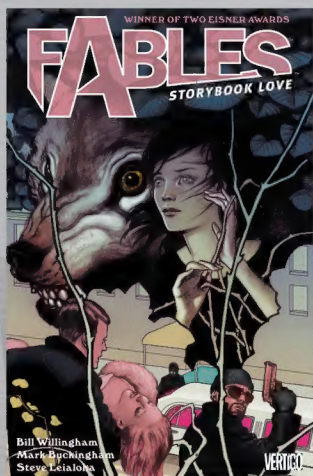
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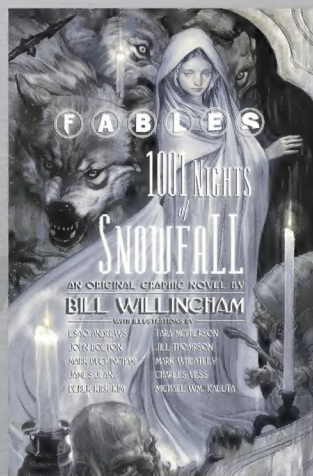
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